

# Rattlesnake contact foretells good times

**Alan Katz**  
Denver Post Staff Writer

**W**ell-wishers and curiosity-seekers gathered at the Tivoli Wednesday night for the opening of Denver's most daring new restaurant. With expensive Jasper Johns and David Hockney prints mounted on unfinished walls revealing the ravages of the old brewery's past, **The Rattlesnake Club** has the bombed-out look of opulence in wartime. Opened at a cost of about \$3 million, it embraces the idea that a modern restaurant should be playful.

Owned by **Bevans Branham**, **Michael McCarty** and **Jimmy Schmidt**, and designed by **Communication Arts of Boulder**, it's a large, skylight-covered space with three floors encompassing a giant copper brewing vat and great arched windows that overlook the Denver skyline.

The a la carte menu changes daily and features contemporary American cuisine prepared by Schmidt, who gained national prominence as the head chef at Detroit's London Chop House. Since most entrees range in price from about \$16 to \$19, the average dinner tab will hover around \$40 per person for dinner, wine and tip.

The soup I ordered on opening night, a bowl of shellfish bisque (\$4.50), was loaded with huge chunks of fresh lobster, including an entire shelled claw. I followed that with angel hair pasta with a lime sauce, topped with grilled shrimp, sweet pepper and avocado. Both soup and pasta were stupendously good.

The entrees included swordfish with macadamia nuts and champagne, escallop of salmon with cognac and mustard sauce, medallions of lamb with red onion and pepper sauce and smoked pork chops with sauteed onions and apples, served with pecan pancakes.

The week after a restaurant opens is similar to preview performances at the theater: Often, the show is plagued by production problems and blown lines. At this opening, groups of idle waiters stood uneasily in circles waiting for something to do. Despite the excess of manpower, coordination between the waiters and the kitchen was poor, and I had to wait 40 minutes for my dessert. But within a week, service should improve.

Downstairs in the bar, Johnny Walker Red scotch, Beefeeders gin, Wild Turkey bourbon, Cuervo Gold tequila and Smirnoff vodka are poured from the well for \$3 a drink. Alongside the bar is an exhibition cooking area where a chef prepares duck and lobster tacos, designer pizzas and brochettes of oysters, scallops and swordfish.

Boulder recording artist **Peter**

**Kater** plays piano Thursdays through Saturdays in the lounge adjoining the bar. However, Kater will be absent this Saturday night; he'll be in concert at the Rainbow Music Hall. When Kater's run at The Rattlesnake Club ends, Branham says he'll import a pianist from Los Angeles or New York.

Branham, by the way, celebrated the evening in a gray flannel suit with python shoes and light pink socks. A 35-year-old part-time capital investment counselor, he started **My Friends** restaurant in Evergreen with McCarty and sold it four years ago. After signing an option for the Tivoli space in 1977, he waited eight years for the restaurant to become a reality. At first he planned to call it Bevans, then worried that it sounded pompous. At his wife Laurie's suggestion, he decided to call it The Rattlesnake Club.

It was a wise decision. I can envision having some very good times at this decidedly un-pompous place.